

Legislative Forum

10th DISTRICT



Norma Smith
State Representative

Olympia Office:

417 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7884

10th District Office:

22 Front Street N.W., Suite C
Coupeville, WA 98239
(360) 678-3604

Toll-free hotline:

1-800-562-6000

E-mail:

Smith.Norma@leg.wa.gov

Web site:

www.houserepublicans.wa.gov/Smith

COMMITTEES:

- Capital Budget
- Insurance, Financial Services & Consumer Protection
- Transportation

INTERIM COMMITTEES:

- Ferry Review Phase II Study Group
- The Governor's Council on HIV/AIDS
- Joint Transportation Committee - Ferry Policy Committee

Dear friends and neighbors,

Thank you for trusting me to serve as part of your 10th District legislative team. It was a fast-paced session with many issues affecting our district placed front and center. The most urgent issue I worked on this year was finding a solution to our ferry crisis. We have more work ahead to make sure the state addresses our water highways. This will continue to be one of my top priorities.

Along with transportation, I continued to advocate for fiscal responsibility and sound planning for our future. We had some hits and some misses, but we also made good progress on public safety and environmental measures this year.

This brief update will give you information on a few of the issues I worked on for our communities. I encourage you to contact me if there is something you need additional information on, or if you have questions.

My door is always open to you, and I want to hear what you have to say on the issues affecting the 10th District. I'll also be working my way around the district during interim and would be pleased to meet with you, your community group, school or other civic group to discuss legislative issues, ideas and answer questions. My contact information is listed to the left.

Thank you for the privilege of serving you.

Sincerely,

Representative Norma Smith



10th District office is open

Bringing the Legislature back home, I opened my district office in Coupeville in March. The office is located at 22 Front Street N.W., Suite C. It is staffed Monday through Friday, from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., by legislative aide and Coupeville native Brad Sherman.

I am excited to be back home serving our communities. The 10th District is also fortunate to have one of its own working by my side. I know Brad will serve us well and take care of folks who need assistance navigating state agencies or simply want information about the legislative process.

I encourage folks to stop by or call for assistance any time. The district office phone number is (360) 678-3604.



GOOD NEWS: BUDGET TRANSPARENCY BILL PASSES

Beginning January 2009, citizens will be able to easily search the state budget online to find out how and where state tax dollars are spent. This searchable Web site will help citizens take a more active role in state budgeting. Local budgets will not be included on the Web site.

2008 supplemental budget

I continue to have great concerns about the size of the state operating budget, which has ballooned to \$33.7 billion. Over the past four years, spending has increased 33 percent, or \$8.7 billion. The additional \$291 million in spending this year represents a 16 percent increase, while revenues are only growing at 7 percent.

Nonpartisan budget staff project that this excessive spending will create a \$2.5 billion deficit next budget cycle, which begins in 2009.

I simply cannot support the decisions by executive and legislative leadership to outspend our revenues and expect taxpayers to pay more. We must prioritize spending and avoid creating costly new programs that we cannot fund.

Property tax protection

In a special legislative session last November, the voter-approved Initiative 747 was reinstated by the Legislature. The measure prohibits taxing districts from increasing their tax levies (property taxes) by more than 1 percent annually without voter approval.

This was a good step to slow the growing property tax burden families are facing, but we could have done more during the 2008 legislative session. Families are struggling to keep up with the growing tax burden and the rising cost of food and fuel.

During the interim, I will continue to work on and support legislation for 2009 to ease the tax burden on homeowners.

Career and technical education programs get boost

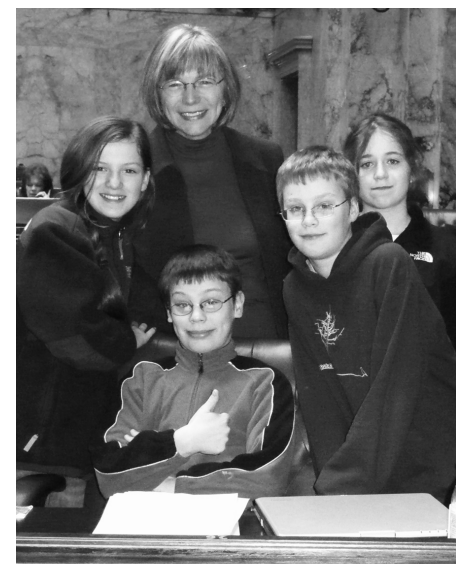
Career and technical education (CTE) received a lot of support this year. With 175,000 students relying on career-path courses, legislators knew it was time to update the 20-year-old programs to make sure they fit the needs of today's students and their future career paths.

The legislation I supported this year will ensure CTE programs are not squeezed out by growing credit requirements for graduation. It also requires CTE programs to clearly connect course skills with recognized certificates, apprenticeships and technical college programs. It's important that students have better access to and awareness of CTE programs and the myriad of career

opportunities available through them.

The Legislature allocated \$2.75 million to begin the updates to CTE programs. In addition, I was pleased to support the \$100 million allocation in the capital budget for skills centers, including the Skagit County Skills Center. This legislation had strong support from parents, students, school districts and employers.

We believe these valuable programs will help students prepare for success outside of high school and help lower the drop out rate.



Rep. Norma Smith with friends Michelle, Rachel, Alec, and Ben Mayer

District ferry progress update



My appointment to the House Transportation Committee placed me at the epicenter of the ferry crisis. The removal of the Steel Electric boats last November left our communities without a crucial highway link between Keystone and Port Townsend. The decision by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) had far-reaching impacts on families, businesses, and the military that rely on this run. Unfortunately, WSDOT had no backup plan to restore car ferry service and our community faced a crisis.

How we got here

To understand our current situation and how we proceed in the future, it is helpful to look at how we got here. In 2003, the Legislature allocated \$285 million to replace the Steel Electric boats. Despite providing the money five years ago, the boats just now reached the design phase. In 2006, the ferry system decided to build boats too large for our needs and, as a result, had no plan to replace the Steel Electrics when safety issues forced them out of service.

The right boat

The governor proposed spending \$100 million to build three Steilacoom II vessels for the Keystone-Port Townsend route, which is the current temporary boat on the run. From the start, I was concerned about the size and capability of this vessel, and went to

work immediately to find alternatives. I discussed my concerns with the Secretary of Transportation and received a commitment that other options would be considered.

After participating in the February test run of the Steilacoom II, it was clear it is not the right boat to meet our long-term needs. Your comments and my conversations with WSDOT officials were successful in helping the department reconsider their recommendation.

Next steps

As we move forward with solutions, I am guided by my firm commitment to restore full service as soon as possible. I want to be sure the boats that are built are capable of meeting the unique requirements of the route, and take into consideration long-term service demands.

I supported the supplemental transportation budget that included \$84.5 million to build three replacement boats for the Keystone-Port Townsend route and \$283.2 million to continue work on the 144-car boats. When the Legislature considered the budget, the \$84.5 million for the Keystone-Port Townsend route was considered sufficient for delivering the boats on an accelerated timeline. The plan was to build one Steilacoom II to provide uninterrupted car service for the short-term, while building two Island Home type vessels as the permanent solution. The Steilacoom II would then be used on another route and as an emergency backup for the ferry system.

Bids and timing

The recent bid opening for the Steilacoom II was disappointing. Only one shipyard submitted a bid and it was \$9 million over the WSDOT's estimate. The bid was rejected and the agency is re-bidding the contract.

This situation increases my concerns about how the timeline for the new boats will be affected. In addition, it is critical that ample funding is available for the two vessels that are scheduled to be the long-term replacements on the Keystone-Port Townsend route. I am working closely with other elected officials and WSDOT to get the right boats built quickly and for a fair price.

I will continue to work hard as your legislator on transportation issues. Our ferry system needs serious reforms, and together we can make the changes needed to ensure reliable and safe ferry service in our district and around Puget Sound.



Island Home ferry

Critical public safety bills pass

One of the most important bills passed this year was House Bill 2713. It expands a statewide DNA database of people convicted of sex crimes or crimes considered by experts to be precursors to sex crimes. This bill is a proactive step for our law enforcement and families.

We also passed House Bill 2786 this year to allow law enforcement to list Level 1 sex offenders guilty of failing to maintain their required address registration on the statewide sex offender notification Web site. This is critical because sex offenders who don't want law enforcement or the public to know where they live are the ones we worry about the most.



INFORMATION CORNER: WANT TO FIND A BILL YOU TRACKED THIS SESSION?

Many of you call me to ask how to find a bill you have been watching or reading about.

Here's where you can find the latest bill information online:
www.leg.wa.gov/legislature.

Click on the "Bill Search" tab and enter a subject (eg: salmon) or a bill number.

Environment

Our pristine environment is part of the reason so many families relocate to Washington. The 10th District has a rich history of preserving land and protecting our natural resources. That's why I was pleased to support several bills that take positive action. A good example of this effort is the Healthy Kids, Local Farms legislation. This bill promotes schools buying fresh fruits and vegetables from our local farms. This will cut carbon emissions and encourage kids to eat healthy produce while supporting local agriculture.

Capital projects receive funding

This year's capital budget included funding for several exciting and much-needed projects around the 10th District. From the Ebey's and Useless Bay farmland projects on Whidbey Island, the Skagit County manure digester and the Camano Island Health Clinic, it was a privilege to support and help secure funding for our region's infrastructure upgrades. If you would like more information on projects in your community, please contact my district office at (360) 678-3604.

Comments:

I always appreciate hearing your thoughts. Please fill out the space below and mail it to my Coupeville office at P.O. Box 507, Coupeville, WA 98239.

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